

# Indiana House of Representatives

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## News and Information

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### **REP. BOB BISCHOFF'S STATEHOUSE REPORT**

INDIANAPOLIS – Lawmakers returned to the Statehouse this week for the 2005 session of the Indiana General Assembly facing a state government that has changed drastically.

Voters in Indiana have elected Mitch Daniels as our new governor and given Republicans majorities in both the House and Senate. While these results are not what I would have liked, I look forward to working with the governor and our colleagues across the aisle in passing legislation that benefits all Hoosiers. Bipartisan cooperation has helped us enact many positive laws in the past, and I hope that we can continue to work together.

Certainly the landscape is different, but I also believe that the Legislature will be facing many of the same problems that have cropped up in recent years. In this, my first weekly report for the 2005 session, I want to give you a preview of some of the issues that we are certain to consider, starting with the one thing we have to do this year.

Legislators are required by the Indiana Constitution to pass a biennial state budget every two years. This will be our primary goal during the 2005 "long session," which is scheduled to last through the end of April.

Crafting a budget remains a delicate balancing act: funding the programs that are needed with the revenues that are on hand. With Indiana slowly digging its way out of the latest national recession, our work has been difficult and we have been required to use more of our financial reserves and emergency funds than I would like. However, I feel that has been a better option than cutting funding for our schools and other areas like public safety.

We are starting to see the benefits of the tax restructuring passed by the Legislature in 2002 and the Energize Indiana job creation and retention program that went into effect in 2003. By creating more jobs, we are increasing the revenues collected by the state and making it easier to fund vital programs.

But we are not out of the woods, and we will have difficult choices in how we allocate state tax dollars.

Do we devote more money to schools? Should economic development be our primary obligation? Can we afford to ignore obligations to programs like Medicaid that help our senior citizens? What about helping Hoosiers receive affordable health care, particularly prescription drugs? Or should we work toward cutting taxes? If we cut government spending, where should we start? Medicaid and other support services? How about education or public safety or corrections?

Last summer, a study committee examined the impact of drastically reducing or eliminating property taxes in our state. Possible solutions ranged from a 25 percent cut all the way to complete elimination of the property tax, but any serious debate must include discussions of replacing the revenue that will be lost.

Economic development has been identified as a priority by our new governor, so we will be looking at additional incentives to attract new companies and help existing businesses expand their operations.

The governor's plan includes increased research and development tax credits, automatic property tax breaks for companies that create new jobs and speeding up efforts at job growth, but I think most of the public attention in this area will focus on a proposal to bring daylight-saving time to Indiana.

Our state has a dizzying array of time zones, and our new governor believes daylight-saving time will bring some

clarity that can help our economic efforts. Those against the move feel the present situation reflects the needs of different areas of the state, and that nothing needs to be done. Based on past history, there is no doubt that daylight-saving time will generate the most public response of anything we do in 2005.

I also want to see the Legislature explore expansion of broadband services through the state, a plan that would give businesses and individuals more access to new markets available through the Internet.

As we consider ways to improve our state's economic outlook, we must also remember our responsibility to Indiana's greatest economic resource: our workers. We must protect the rights of working men and women who lose their jobs through outsourcing, we must give them support to tide them over as they look for work, and we must make sure they are safe in the workplace.

Education also will be a priority, and I believe we will continue to examine ways to get students the training needed to secure good-paying jobs. Lawmakers will be debating the possibility of full-day kindergarten and moving the ISTEP test to the spring. To help make college more affordable, we will be considering a plan requiring state-supported universities in Indiana to cap the size of tuition increases.

Affordability will be a prime consideration in examining improvements to our health care system. Indiana has made remarkable strides in setting up a system to provide prescription drugs to seniors at a lower cost, and I want to see us expand those programs to more groups of people. In addition, there is support for a plan that would enable small businesses in Indiana to pool their resources in order to get more affordable health care, including insurance and drugs.

Another subject studied last summer was the possibility of streamlining state and local governments to make them more efficient, avoid duplication of services, and save tax dollars. In 2004, this debate emerged when lawmakers looked at a proposal to eliminate township government, and I suspect that will be examined again in 2005.

Gaming issues traditionally play a prominent role in legislative sessions, and 2005 will be no different. There will be efforts to expand gaming, as well as attempts to curb any expansion. Playing a role in these discussions will be the proposed plan to use gaming proceeds to help fund construction of a new football stadium in downtown Indianapolis for the Colts. I will be doing everything in my power to make sure that area counties continue to get their fair share of proceeds generated by local boats.

Over the course of this session, any number of other ideas will receive play. These include beefing up our state's efforts to stop the flow of the drug methamphetamine, closing corporate tax loopholes that have helped increase taxes for Hoosiers, and enacting tougher fines against utility companies that abuse the public trust.

As these issues make their way through the system, rest assured that I will keep you informed of their progress.

I always look forward to hearing from you throughout the year, but particularly during the session. You can reach me in one of several ways: calling me via the toll-free Statehouse telephone number of 1-800-382-9842, e-mailing me through my Internet Web site at [www.IN.gov/H68](http://www.IN.gov/H68) or writing to me in care of: the Indiana House of Representatives, 200 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.

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